

# **The Effects of Fire on Lemhi Penstemon (*Penstemon Lemhiensis*) – Final Monitoring Report 1995 - 2000**

Prepared for:

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest  
and  
Dillon Field Office - Bureau of Land Management

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June 2001



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Agreement 00-CS-11010200-016  
Agreement 1422E930A960015, Task Order No. 23

**This document should be cited as follows:**

Heidel, B. and J. S. Shelly. 2001. The effects of fire on Lemhi penstemon (*Penstemon lemhiensis*) – final monitoring report, 1995-2000. Report to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and the Dillon Field Office - Bureau of Land Management. Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena. 22 pp. plus appendices.

# Executive Summary

Lemhi penstemon (*Penstemon lemhiensis*) is a short-lived perennial that occupies early-to mid-successional habitats. In Beaverhead County it is found in settings that are dominated by mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *vaseyana*). Previous monitoring indicated that the species was declining in major populations and that new plant recruitment was absent, so we evaluated prescribed burning as a management action for maintaining long-term species viability. The response of *Penstemon lemhiensis* to prescribed burn treatments was determined at 3 sites in Beaverhead County over 5-6 consecutive years, comparing pre- and post-burn trends.

Key indicators of species' viability, including population growth rates and recruitment-to-mortality ratios, increased drastically at one site following a prescribed burn where the species faced competition. Species viability showed little net change in a second site and declined in the third, where results were confounded by grazing effects and incomplete prescribed burn treatment, respectively. We conclude that fire is an appropriate tool in *Artemisia*

*tridentata* – dominated habitats where the species faces competition. Carefully timed and managed prescribed fire treatments can be used to restore the habitat of *Penstemon lemhiensis* in cases where competition has increased. After the use of fire for habitat restoration, grazing in treated habitats needs to be managed to allow successful recruitment and reproduction of new individuals. Noxious weed control should be incorporated into any habitat management plans, as needed, to prevent the invasion or further spread of invasive plant species after fire treatments.

We have also demonstrated that population trends for *Penstemon lemhiensis* are well-buffered by the existence of seed banks. Monitoring results indicate that the seed banks can remain viable for at least six years, and support germination and recruitment episodes during years of higher moisture, cooler average temperatures, or taking advantage of disturbance events such as fire.



Illustration of *Penstemon lemhiensis*, by Jeanne R. Janish, from 'Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest'

# Acknowledgements

The support and annual monitoring coordination provided by Dan Svoboda, John Joy and Brian Hockett are acknowledged with special gratitude. We thank each of the people who have assisted in the field over the six years of annual monitoring, including Kari Rogers, Dale McKnight, Katie Bump, Tobin Kelley, Katie Svoboda, Anne Dalton and Reyer Rens. We also acknowledge the help of people working in the permit review processes, burn treatment plans, and every related task.

Seed dormancy tests were conducted by Dr. Susan Meyer (Intermountain Research Station in Provo, Utah.) This work was benefited by early discussions with Caryl Elzinga and Linda Pietarinen. Current Idaho status information on

*Penstemon lemhiensis* was provided by Michael Mancuso (Idaho Conservation Data Center.) Population projections were run by Dr. Christine Damiani (Duke University.) The report was edited by Joy Lewis (MTNHP) and formatted by Katrina Scheuerman (NRIS). It benefited by the review of Rob Sutter (Southeast Regional Office of The Nature Conservancy.) Our thanks go out to all these people.

The study was supported by a multi-year challenge cost-share agreement between the Montana Natural Heritage Program and the Beaverhead National Forest, and a separate series of annual challenge cost-shares agreements between the Montana Natural Heritage Program and the Montana State Office of the Bureau of Land Management.

# Table of Contents

Introduction and Research Background .....	1
Species Background .....	2
Study Areas .....	3
Methods .....	4
Field Methods .....	4
Data Analysis .....	6
Results .....	7
Census Results .....	7
Projection Results .....	12
Other Life History Results .....	12
Associated Vegetation Change .....	13
Discussion and Recommendations .....	15
Fire as a Management Tool .....	15
Challenges in Data Interpretation .....	16
Fire History .....	17
Seed Germination .....	18
Herbivory and Rangeland Management .....	19
Literature Cited .....	20

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Study area characteristics .....	3
Table 2. Documentation of <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> stage class, reproduction and damage .....	5
Table 3. Prescribed burn conditions at study sites .....	6
Table 4. Pre- and post-burn mortality and recruitment levels of <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> .....	11
Table 5. <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> population growth rates under pre- and post-burn conditions ...	12
Table 6. Plant species of highest cover values before/after burn .....	13
Figure 1. Life history of <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> .....	7
Figures 2-6. <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> monitoring trend overview in the five sample plots .....	8-9
Figure 7. New <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> rosettes at Badger Pass North following fire .....	10
Figures 8-10. Pre-/post-burn vegetation cover at the three study sites .....	14

## APPENDIX

Appendix A. <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> chilling experiment
Appendix B. Annual climate data for study areas, nearest stations at Dillon and Wise River
Appendix C. Pre- and post-burn plot photographs
Appendix D. Stage matrix, elasticity's, and sensitivities
Appendix E. <i>Penstemon lemhiensis</i> monitoring at French Creek
Appendix F. Global and State Ranking Guidelines